



Inside Scoop to

PET CARE SERVICES



Table of Contents

Introduction	2
Professional Animal Care	2
How to Use the Guide & Workbook	4
Lessons Learned	5
Part 1 – Behind Closed Doors – Professional Animal Care Operations.....	8
1.1 Animal Care Technical Knowledge & Safe Handling.....	8
1.2. Recognizing & Managing Stress	14
1.3. Keys to Cleaning & Disinfecting	17
1.4. Animal Lodging Health & Safety.....	20
1.5. Feeding, Dispensing Medications & Record Keeping.....	25
1.6. Exercise, Eliminations & Fun Activities.....	28
1.7. Daycare – Keeping It Safe and Fun.....	30
1.8. Spa Services: Grooming & Bathing	34
1.9. Dog Training – Choosing & Designing Programs.....	37
1.10. Dog Walking and Pet Sitting.....	39
Part 2 – Business Policies, Upfront Customer Care, Personnel, Marketing & Support Systems.....	40
2.1. Policies Set to Meet Your Business Goals	40
2.2. Policies for Animal Health and Safety	42
2.3. Peak Periods – Planning & Survival Tips	46
2.4. Handling Emergencies	48
2.5. Making the Right First Impression and Making Money.....	50
2.6. Hiring, Managing & Scheduling Staff – Tips for Successful Teamwork	55
2.7. Employee Safety	59
2.8. Marketing – Grow Your Business Quickly	61
2.9. Counting Beans – Monitoring Cash Flow, Business Seasonality & Growing Profits.....	64
2.10. Keeping It All Going – Tips on handling facility support systems.....	68
Conclusion	70

Introduction

Congratulations on taking a big step to setting your new business up for success! To many outsiders the pet care industry appears simple and straightforward...you have the best job in the world, playing with pets all day!

Enjoying pets is a definite benefit, but one that comes with a *HUGE* amount of responsibility. In fact one of my strongest memories is the intern that worked with us one summer that wanted to open a pet business. While he loved the work he told me at summer's end that he would not be opening a pet business. He could not handle the responsibility of professional pet care and was grateful to learn that before he invested more time and money into his dream.

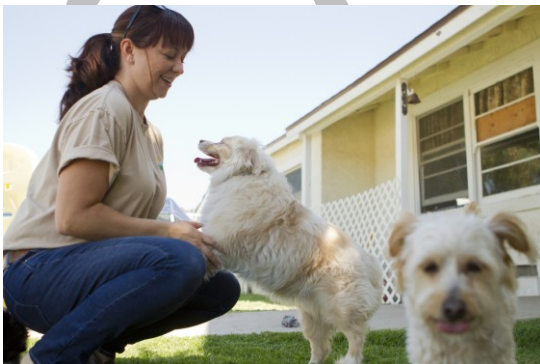
This is the primary goal of the "inside scoop to pet care services" to share the details and surprises in operating a professional pet business. The monetary investment to open a pet facility continues to increase and competition continues to grow.

Make sure the hard work you put in to starting a business is one that you will love operating. You will get to play with pets, but as you'll learn here, there are a lot of other work responsibilities required.

Professional Animal Care

The well being of each pet is your responsibility while under your care. You have probably considered the importance of physical safety, but have you thought about the emotional well-being and keeping them behaviorally as well off or better than when they arrived? Keeping pets happy is key to their health and is an important requirement of professional pet care providers.

You are probably reading this because you love caring for your own pets and want to offer your market a different business model or level of care than exists



currently. The first tip you need to know about professional pet care is that while your experience with your own pets is helpful, you do not have all the knowledge you need to care for pets professionally.

When someone pays you money to provide pet care services you are expected to know how to keep their pet safe, healthy and happy. Caring for 5 or

fewer pets in your home is very different than caring for 25 to over 100 animals in a day.

Each pet is an individual and even when you understand breed tendencies there will be new situations all the time. After almost twenty years in professional pet care I still learn something new every year. So if you are an avid learner like me this is a part of professional pet care you will enjoy.

For over five years we provided hands-on training at our pet care business for people wanting to learn professional pet care. Feedback from the dozens of participants after their experiences were similar, and generally started with: “I had no idea...”

- There was so much detail involved
- How physically hard this work is
- That not all dogs enjoy dog daycare
- The weight of the responsibility of caring for so many pets
- The challenge of managing a large dog playgroup
- The speed of dog play and how fast things change
- How much I do not know about dog body language and behavior
- The challenge of hiring, training and keeping a top notch team of staff
- That I’m really operating multiple businesses requiring different processes
- The crazy requests and expectations of pet parents

Now the good news is that this guide will remove many of the surprises that I experienced starting my pet care career. The fact that others can benefit from the many challenges I faced operating my business helps make it seem worthwhile.

Not only do you get access to my direct experiences you are really learning from hundreds of pet business owners. As an active member in industry trade associations since 1999 and a consultant with dozens of pet business clients for the last seven years, the Inside Scoop is a compilation of many lessons learned from hands-on pet care experiences.

You may find that after reading the guide and completing the workbook you have more questions than answers. Rather than feeling frustrated this is actually progress as they are most likely questions you would not have had prior to reading the guide.

There is no one “right way” to create and design your pet care business. Your goal should be to create the business that meets your personal goals. This guide provides information from real world experiences and offers resources for additional research so you make very informed decisions in creating your business policies and operating procedures.

Safe Animal Handling

As a primary part of any job in professional animal care you will be required to handle pets. It is important to determine and document the pet handling policies for your business. You should take pride in providing a high level of care that treats each pet in your business with respect and gentleness.

Animals view the world a little simpler than humans so keep in mind these basic principles as you create your safe handling policy:



- Each experience is either familiar (e.g., environment, people, sounds, etc.) or unfamiliar (i.e., unfamiliar can trigger stress or fear)
- Proceed at the pace comfortable for the animal (e.g., they do not display stress signals or aggressive displays)
- Observe body language for signs of stress, fear and aggressive displays
- Safety comes first for staff and all animals in your care

Be sure your Employee Handbook clearly states that it is unacceptable to strike, hit or kick a pet in your care. Following are additional points you may want to include in your animal handling procedures and staff training process.

1. **Walking pets** on lead is an important part of your responsibilities. Dogs should **always** be on a leash or kennel lead in the lobby and all common areas of the facility (e.g., halls & walkways). To retain control and safety you should walk a maximum of two dogs at a time. This is when they are of similar size, do not pull and are known to be dog friendly.

2. Dogs should be walked on a **loose leash** so you must keep an eye on each dog you are walking and retain control of their movement. Be careful with small or shy dogs that you do not end up dragging them behind you. Using a higher pitched excited voice to call a dog to you is often all that is needed to get a reluctant dog moving. It is never acceptable to just pull and drag them as you may cause an injury.



3. **Carrying small dogs** should be a last resort as you have less control and they may jump out of your arms and injure themselves. When small dogs are carried they should be held close to your chest horizontally with an arm supporting their

1.2. Recognizing & Managing Stress

It is very important that you are aware of **stress signals** in dogs and cats in the professional pet care environment. Animals get stressed in situations of threat, unfamiliarity, pain, or excitement. But overall a pet gets stressed for the same reason as we do – when they feel unable to cope in a situation.



Your goal in professional animal care is to recognize the early **warning signs** of stress and make the pet comfortable. Staying observant of body language and behavior you will be able to identify animals that remain in stress. Multiple signals for an extended period of time are red flags that their health and safety may be at risk.

In extreme stress a dog will be forced into a flight or fight response if its stress is not diffused. Professional care environments limit the ability of dogs to flee and security of the facility must be a priority to prevent escaped pets. Including the following safety items in your design is recommended:

- Double gates and doors
- Interior walls minimum of 6'
- Exterior fencing minimum of 8'
- Exterior fencing buried 1' into ground
- Tops on some lodging enclosures
- Secure ceilings in cat lodging community areas

Keep in mind when a dog can't flee their extreme stress response may be to fight. When dogs are lodging this requires good observation and caution when entering enclosures.



In dog playgroups when a stressed dog is able to flee this action frequently stimulates a prey-drive based chase behavior in the other dogs that may result in a fight. Being observant of stress signals is an important proactive step for the safety and health of all animals.

Honestly explaining risks, the preventative steps you take and being open when an outbreak occurs is the best client relation policy for communicable diseases.

- c. **Stress symptoms** are important cues that can prevent illness in lodging pets. A timely response to reduce stress in individual animals will minimize cases requiring veterinary care. Gastrointestinal stress will be identifiable by loose stools, diarrhea, blood in stool or urine and at times vomiting. Other stress cues are hair or weight loss, dehydration, development of hot spots or ear infections. Stress compromises the immune system and can quickly lead to these health issues. Veterinary treatment is required immediately in cases of dehydration and rapid weight loss. Medical care is also recommended for gastrointestinal symptoms that continue for more than 24 hours, especially in younger or older animals.

- d. **Safe lodging** requires several operational policy decisions. Keep in mind that the professional lodging environment is very different from home (e.g., new surroundings, increased stress, smaller physical space) so you may see behaviors in pets that owners have never seen. As you plan your business determine the answers to these questions:



1. Will you accept and handle aggressive pets (i.e., to humans, to other dogs); how will you identify and safely handle them?
 2. Do you have tops on your lodging enclosures; if not, will you keep dogs that climb?
 3. Will you remove collars to prevent tags catching on fencing; how will you identify dogs if collars are removed?
 4. What items will be left with dogs in enclosures overnight; some dogs eat or shred any and everything.
 5. Will you keep family or non-family pets together?
 6. What limits or space requirements will you require per pet?
 7. Will you board family cats & dogs together; how do you ensure safety of both?
- e. **Staff onsite overnight** is a significant added expense, but a feature desired by many business owners and pet parents. When you are staffed 24/7 pet owners will request special services. Rest is very important to the health of the pets boarding so you do not want to disturb all pets frequently. You may need to create a separate “go home” staging area for late night pick-ups. As you make the decision on staffed overnights, answer these questions:

1.6. Exercise, Eliminations & Fun Activities

Proper exercise is an important factor to the health of lodging pets. Best practices recommend a minimum of 30 minutes of exercise daily that can be divided into 2 or more sessions during the day. Exercise areas should be large enough to allow dogs to break into a trot. Exercise sessions are often combined with potty breaks.

Your facility design of potty areas will determine the procedures for the elimination process. Documenting eliminations is just as important as food consumption and medications. Again, abnormal eliminations are one of the first signals that a pet may be ill or stressed.



Don't limit your focus to diarrhea. Watch for constipation and begin steps to alleviate if you have any doubt. You want to avoid a potential serious medical issue.

Confirming that urination and stools are regular and normal is a requirement of professional pet care. In community lodging environments this can be a challenge, but is still an important item to monitor. Good communication with daycare attendants may be required when abnormal eliminations are observed and it is not clear which dog it is from.

Dehydration can occur quickly and result in a medical emergency so documenting all instances of loose stools is critical. Keeping good records of unusual eliminations help define what is normal for a specific pet and help ensure staff notice possible trends quickly that indicate ill health.

- Blood in urine or stool is a symptom that, unless it is a one-time occurrence, will require veterinary care.
- Not eliminating for 24 hours or loose stools for 48 hours are other important symptoms that will also require veterinary care.

Withholding food for 24 hours when a pet has loose stools will often give the gastro-intestinal system time to settle and return to normal when food is reintroduced. The exceptions to fasting would be young puppies, very tiny dogs or animals with weak immune systems.

Fun activities offered for lodging pets are a favorite for pets, owners and staff. Individual playtimes, story time, special treats and cuddles & pats are popular activities to offer. You want to create a fun place for pets to stay and activity packages do this plus result in healthier pets.

2.2. Policies for Animal Health and Safety

Establishing your **health and vaccination protocol** is another balance. You should consider the health and safety of all pets in your center with the reality of the negative health effects of:

- Pet over-vaccination, and
- Lack of early socialization of puppies

Local and state laws must be complied with first and foremost, but beyond these legal requirements you have latitude in setting your policies.

This area does deserve your time to research through your own veterinarian, other local vets and veterinary associations (traditional and holistic). Also find out what policies other pet businesses have and the vaccinations they recommend or require.

Check with local pet businesses and veterinarians to identify level of diseases related to the core vaccines actually seen in your area. You should also research the health issues of over-vaccination and obtain input from holistic practitioners. This is one area in our industry that continues to progress as exhibited by the growing numbers that accept titer reports and veterinarian letters explaining reasons vaccines are not recommended for an individual pet.



In establishing health requirements, operators must look beyond the risk of diseases that are prevented through vaccines. **Controlling pests** like fleas and ticks are also important for professional pet care. Again, there are pets sensitive to many of the topical products and pet owners that are not comfortable using these chemicals on their pets. How do you meet their needs and keep your facility pest free?

Inside Scoop
TIP

CONSIDER A MANDATORY FLEA/TICK BATH POLICY FOR ARRIVING
PETS ON WHICH FLEAS/TICKS ARE FOUND.

Many clients adopt **pets from shelters** or that were found on the street. As vaccination history is often unknown for these animals it is best to establish a waiting period before allowing them into your operations.

2.5. Making the Right First Impression and Making Money

Your reception staff is a critical part of your team as they make the first impression with your potential customers. The old saying that you only get one chance to make a first impression is “oh so true”. You must put as much focus on the customer service provided by your reception or front desk staff as to the quality of care provided by the animal care team.

A focus on **customer service skills** and training for all staff is an important key to long-term success. A reliable telephone system is also important. For a business you need to plan the number of dedicated and rollover lines needed to service clients and other support services. Dedicated phone lines are often required for security systems, fax machines and credit card processing equipment in addition to your main phone line. Rollover lines will be needed to handle multiple incoming and outgoing phone calls simultaneously.



Pet care is a personalized service and many clients expect to talk to a familiar voice when they call. Each business owner must make the decision between staffing efficiency and automated phone greeting messages and sending some callers to voicemail. Using voicemail saves money in staffing, but you may lose new reservations. Keep in mind that new clients are likely to book with the first business where they reach and talk to a “live person”.

Front desk services require equipment to support their multiple duties. Consider the physical space design requirements that will support daily and peak period workflow. Equipment required includes telephones, computers, printers, scanner/fax, copier, credit/debit card processing and cash drawer. Splitting workstations between client reception and a second work area can facilitate overall productivity.

<i>Inside Scoop</i> TIP	TEACH RECEPTION STAFF ALL SERVICES FIRST; THEN FOCUS ON TRAINING FOR PHONES, RESERVATIONS, INVOICING, TAKING PAYMENTS, ETC.
-----------------------------------	---

One challenge faced in a multi-service pet business is **training reception or front desk staff** on the policies & procedures of multiple services. Your reception staff are really required to know 3-6 different businesses (e.g., dog lodging, grooming, dog daycare, training, etc.). Recruiting the perfect person that loves people and pets, with excellent customer service and good math/money



Inside Scoop to

PET CARE SERVICES

WORKBOOK



Inside Scoop Workbook

The workbook is designed to assist you in making decisions for your business in each content area outlined in the Inside Scoop guide. Don't worry if you there are some questions you cannot answer right away. Just a make a note to do some research or spend a little more time thinking about your options.

At the end of the workbook we've supplied a "to do list" template. Summarizing open tasks and additional research steps on one form can help ensure you don't forget or overlook anything.

Remember there is no one "right way" to provide pet care or operate your business. As you read the guide and work through the questions for each section you are making key decisions that help you make your pet care vision turn into reality.

Use the answers in this workbook to create your operating policies and procedures. When you open these may only be an outline, but will serve as a tool to keep your staff consistent in performing their responsibilities. The step-by-step details can be completed once you confirm best practices for your business.

Some questions you may not be able to fully answer until you have a physical facility for your pet business. Mark these questions so you can go back and complete them when you reach this major milestone.

The goal in completing the workbook is that you are prepared to provide exceptional animal care, provide great customer service and create a culture for your pet business that you and your team enjoy every day!

RESOURCES:

Example operational procedures for pet care



www.ibpsa.com

dog*tec
our business is to help yours succeed
www.dogtec.org

1.1 Animal Care Technical Knowledge & Safe Handling

1. Complete the table below for your personal training needs and curriculum you want to include in your staff training program:

Area	Personal Need?	Staff Curriculum?
Canine breeds, health & behavior		
Feline breeds, health & behavior		
Dog body language		
Cat body language		
Animal first aid		
Dog leadership skills		
Group play behavior & management skills		
Dog greeting behaviors/social evaluations		
Gentle & respectful animal handling		
Animal stress signals		
Safe response to aggressive displays		

2. Assess your own skill levels by answering these questions:
 - a. How are your dog leadership skills?
 - i. My dogs are really running the house
 - ii. Good and ready to practice for my new career
 - iii. Excellent and ready to open my business
 - b. How are your skills at reading dog body language?
 - i. Really...how do you look at the eyes and tail at the same time?
 - ii. Good and ready to practice for my new career
 - iii. Excellent and ready to open my business
 - c. How comfortable are you handling pets in the following situations? (i.e., think of ways you can gain experience prior to opening your business)
 - i. Loose leash walking all sizes and breeds of dogs
 - ii. Putting dogs of all sizes and breeds in and out of enclosures
 - iii. Putting dogs of all sizes and breeds in and out of crates
 - iv. Putting dogs of all sizes and breeds in and out of groom cages
 - v. Putting cats in and out of their lodging enclosures
3. Pre-opening **Action Items** (add applicable items to your “to do list”)
 - a. Personal technical animal knowledge obtained in weak areas

- b. Compile staff training curriculum listing
 - c. Create business Safe Animal Handling Policy for Employee Handbook
 - d. Outline Safe Animal Handling procedures for new staff
4. Other Notes:

1.2. Recognizing & Managing Stress

1. Observe your own pets for stress signals in new or uncomfortable situations.
 - a. What do you notice in their behavior?
 - b. What actions can you take to reduce their stress and make them more comfortable?
2. Pre-opening **Action Items** (add applicable items to your “to do list”)
 - a. List safety features to include in facility design to prevent pet escapes and minimize animal stress
 - b. Create a stress management procedure for your business including list of tools and calming aids you will utilize
 - c. Outline Stress Recognition & Management procedures for new staff
3. Other Notes: